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What we value most is Christ Himself

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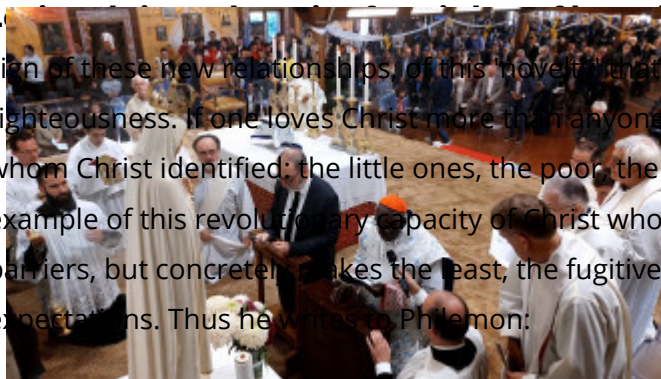


«What we value most is Christ Himself». This statement is the most profound profession of faith that a Christian heart can make. As we notice from the Gospel, from His first appearance, a large crowd follows Jesus. His word always has something fascinating about it and everyone can find something in it that suits them and judges them before themselves or others. Yesterday, today, a large crowd has always sought, seeks, and will

seek to take possession of the Lord for what suits them. Jesus, on the other hand, who knows mankind's heart, immediately says that for those who follow Him it is not a matter of choosing a truth of His, but of choosing Him, a living, real, present Person who wants to be chosen and followed only out of love.

Love, and only love, can justify a radicalness that might otherwise seem abnormal or impossible but that, in the totality that all love entails, love for Him demands such an all-inclusive way because no one and nothing can be above Him. He who loves father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, even his own life more than me, says Jesus, is not worthy of me. It is indeed true that what we value most is Christ. A Christian is not one who loves half-heartedly or does not love the world, but one who loves with such fullness that the world is only one of many moments of this love, but is not exhausted in it. Nothing for me is so reductive of the fullness of Christ's love as to speak of celibacy, which is a negative concept, because it indicates non-fulfilment. Instead, one must speak of virginity which, if for spouses it is not physical, for all, spouses and non-spouses alike, must be interior, liberating, a sign of a choice of faith that finds in Jesus its only Lord, its most precise treasure. Of course, one must not presume of oneself; one must have the daily humility to measure one's own strengths, to fructify one's talents, to stimulate one's charisms, so as not to start a construction that one would then find difficult to complete.


Love is not enough. Life must be the sign of these new relationships, of this "love" that upsets mankind's quiet self-righteousness. If one loves Christ more than anyone else, one must love those with whom Christ identified: the little ones, the poor, the least. St Paul gives us a concrete example of this revolutionary capacity of Christ who not only overcomes all social barriers, but concretely makes the least, the fugitive slave, loved beyond all expectations. Thus he writes to Philemon:



"I Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner because of Jesus Christ. I ask you a favour for Onesimus. Here in prison he has become my son. He is that Onesimus, who was once of no use to you; now he can be of great use to you and to me. He is like a part of myself: I send him back to you. I would have been happy if I could have kept him with me, now that I am a prisoner for proclaiming Christ. He could have ministered to me on your behalf. But I do not want to force you to do this favour: I prefer you to act spontaneously. Therefore I have decided not to do anything without your agreement. Perhaps Onesimus has been separated from you for some time, so that you may receive him back for ever. He is much more than a slave: he is a dear brother to you. He is dear to me, all the more must he be dear to you, both as a man and as a believer. So if you consider me your friend, welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me. And if he has offended you or if he has to return something to you, put

everything on my account. Here is the guarantee written in my hand: I, Paul, will pay for him" (Phlm 1:9-19).

Today, Jesus' invitation stimulates us first of all to renew our union with Him, a truly living and truly beloved person, and not to confuse Him with any ideological project or Christian society, while placing us in the front line in the defence of every human person, especially the smallest and the weakest, from the child that one would like to abort to the old man that one marginalises, or rather that one wants to enable to die 'with dignity' through euthanasia; from the student whose intelligence is manipulated or polluted by gender ideology to the priest who feels frustrated and destroyed because he is falsely accused of sexually abusing minors, to all those men and women who live today in the dictatorship of relativism and one-track thinking, and in doctrinal and moral confusion, tossed about by the waves of a decadent and anti-Christian society, and carried here and there by any wind of doctrine, according to the deceit of men, even with high responsibility in the Church, with that cunning that tends to draw them into error.

T  **Jesus Christ,** the Light of the world, are by now blinded in their minds, estranged from the life of God because of the ignorance within them and the hardness of their hearts. Having become so insensitive, they have given themselves up to debauchery and, insatiable, they commit all kinds of impurity (cf. Eph 4:14-19). The "smallest" are not a social category: they are often anonymous, but those who love Jesus more than their father, their mother, in a word, more than themselves, are able to see those faces because they grasp in them the signs of a Cross they have embraced and the features of a Face that calls. And by contemplating the Father and learning from Him to see and love people as He sees and loves them, Jesus becomes the Person dearest to our hearts.

How is it possible to make Jesus the Person dearest to our hearts?

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel." (Jn 5:19). **Only by contemplating the Father's love for his Son do we, too, learn to love Jesus Christ.** Let us listen to what the Gospels say.

The Evangelist St John tells us that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). In

John's Gospel we encounter the expression "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father" and Matthew adds: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). And at every step Jesus himself affirms his profound communion with the Father: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn 14:11); "that they may be one, just as You, Father, are in me and I am in You" (Jn 17:21). This means that God the Father has given us the most precious treasure: Jesus Christ, that is, God himself has given Himself to us to share the divine life with us. Christ is the treasure of humanity and the Master who teaches us to love in a total way. He is the divine Splendour that illuminates the world and the human heart.

Since the year 2000, a new century, a new millennium have opened in the light of Christ. But unfortunately not everyone sees this Light. On the contrary, they obscure it, they want to extinguish it. For many, even within the Church, this treasure that is Jesus Christ no longer has any importance. Christianity is placed on the same level as other religions. There no longer seems to be any difference between Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Buddha. We no longer need Doctrine or moral teaching inspired by God through Holy Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church. As you see, sin and the silent apostasy of ancient Western societies have darkened people's minds more than ever before. Many have accepted as truth horrendous ideas, such as choosing or changing one's gender, and even choosing to identify with an animal, abortion up to the ninth month, and the euthanasia of children. There is also the rejection of man's Creator God and the attempt to create 'transhumans' who will be physically more powerful and mentally more intelligent than humans, and capable of living forever. Mortal man wants to create immortal man. God is erased from post-Christian societies.

B **sk of being its 'reflux'.** It is the *mysterium lunae* so dear to the contemplation of the Fathers of the Church. It is a task that makes us fearful if we look at the weakness that so often makes us opaque and full of shadows. But it is a task that is possible if, by exposing ourselves to the light of Christ, we know how to open ourselves to the grace that makes us new men. The fact of being baptised, Christians, and therefore of feeling called by name to collaborate with Christ in the cause of the Kingdom, impels us to embark, in our own life, on a journey not only of preparation that leads us to learn more about Jesus, but of experience of prayer and contemplation of life and conversion that allows us to speak to men about the One that we have met. We cannot and must not speak of Jesus Christ if we do not have a personal experience with Him, if we are not able to say, as St John does in his First Letter:

"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have contemplated, and that which our hands have touched, that is,

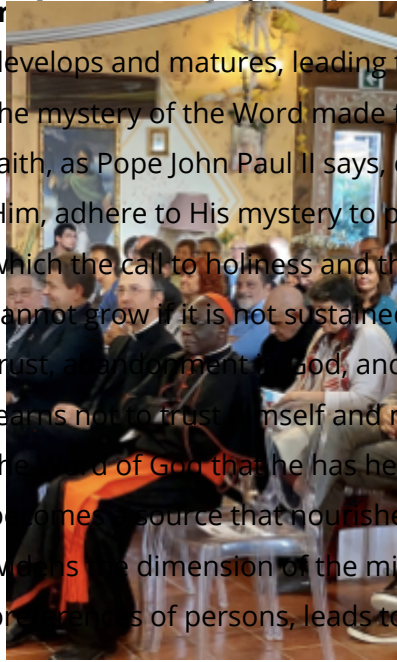
the Word of life (for the Life has become visible, we have seen it, and of this we bear witness, and we proclaim to you the eternal Life, which was with the Father and which has become visible to us), that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:1-3).

The priest, must be a reflection of the light of Christ, so that his message is not a middle of hollow words. What Pope John Paul II said in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* is enlightening: "Our witness would be unbearably poor if we were not first contemplators of His face. And the contemplation of Christ Himself cannot but be inspired by what Sacred Scripture tells us about Him, which, from beginning to end, is inspired by His mystery, obscurely pointed out in the Old Testament, fully revealed in the New, to the point that St Jerome vigorously declares: 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ Himself'.

Remaining anchored in *Scripture*, we open ourselves to the action of the Spirit (cf. *Jn 15:26*), who is at the origin of those writings, and together with *the testimony of the Apostles* (cf. *ibid.*, 27), who had a living experience of Christ, the Word of life, saw Him with their eyes, heard Him with their ears, touched Him with their hands (cf. *1 Jn 1:1*). What comes to us through them is a vision of faith, supported by a precise historical testimony: a truthful testimony, which the Gospels, even in their complex redaction and primarily catechetical purpose, pass on to us in an entirely trustworthy way" (*NMI*, 16-17).

To live the entire mystery of Christ, from the Incarnation to the Passion-Death and Resurrection and glorious Ascension, as it is presented by the Gospels, is a strong requirement for the life of every Christian; that is, to walk with one's gaze fixed on the Lord, in the incarnate face of Christ who is the foundation of and centre of history. He is its meaning and ultimate goal. It is through Him, in fact, the Word and image of the Father, that everything was made (*Jn 1:3; Col 1:15*). It is Christ in His hidden life with Mary and Joseph in the small village of Nazareth, in His ministry lived together with His disciples, in His saving work concluded in the cross, in the Resurrection and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. A mystery to be meditated upon and deepened more and more, and a message to take on in one's own life. Moved by this evangelical power and transformed by this encounter, like the disciples who, having seen and heard, could not remain silent and felt impelled to proclaim Christ to the whole world, so too today's apostles, rooted in silent contemplation and prayer, meditating on the mystery of Christ, the absolute foundation and unique goal of every Christian life, will seek to be, before doing, to contemplate and to love before proclaiming Christ and his Gospel with power and joy.

It is through the Word and prayerful encounter with Christ, the gift of faith develops and matures, leading to the truest, closest, and most coherent knowledge of the mystery of the Word made flesh to dwell in the midst of His people. Only through faith, as Pope John Paul II says, can one come to Jesus and contemplate His face, love Him, adhere to His mystery to participate in His very life. Love is the foundation on which the call to holiness and the evangelising work of the world is rooted. But love cannot grow if it is not sustained by the power of faith, a gift that leads the disciple to trust, abandonment to God, and personal renunciation. Moved by faith, the apostle learns not to trust himself and meekly allows himself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, by the Word of God that he has heard and meditated upon, by divine Providence. Faith becomes a source that nourishes and sustains the call to holiness and evangelisation, widens the dimension of the mission in the desire to embrace the whole world, excludes preferences of persons, leads to works, especially charity and missionary commitment.



But "when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (*Lk 18:8*). A crucial and tragic question! Unfortunately, it is easy for us to fall into mistrust, into unbelief, to let ourselves be overwhelmed by the material things of this world, by our anxieties, by our securities, and to forget God, prayer, which is the sure manifestation of our faith. However, faith, a gift from the Father, the gratitude of man, must continue to grow, become stronger, become like a well-rooted tree that is not afraid of the storms of life. To achieve this, it must be nourished by words, love and prayer, indeed, to quote Bonhoeffer, "the reading of the Word drives us to prayer". And prayer makes faith and love grow in us for what we hold most dear: Jesus Christ.

*** Cardinal**